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Community to Community Exchange & Capacity Building Workshop for Traditional Knowledge Holders

28 September – 4 October 2015, Bangalore, India

- Concept Note -

Context

The Nagoya Protocol (NP) on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (ABS) emphasises the need to take into consideration community protocols on access, utilization and benefit sharing with regard to traditional knowledge (TK) associated with genetic resources (GR). While conceptually this appears clear, in practice operationalising this concept implies challenges at multiple levels. To tap into the economic and development opportunities of ABS and improve the implementation and operationalisation of the NP, there is a need to address challenges at the local level. This involves:

- Understanding the bio-cultural ties between genetic resources, associated traditional knowledge and practices and belief systems of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) – This is usually highly context specific. Depending on the values attributed to different resources, access norms and authorizations for utilization will vary;
- Understanding the utilization patterns of resources within communities for different purposes – This is required to prioritize and strategize ways of conservation and possible value addition;
- Reconciling expectations of communities over possible pay-offs with possible business models and subsequent benefits that could be generated and shared;
- Developing endogenous capacity among communities to negotiate with different external stakeholders on the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, based on the principle of prior informed consent.

Despite these challenges, there are also clear opportunities and strengths that can be leveraged on in this context. IPLCs have high levels of knowledge related to the identification of those GR that are utilized in the community for different purposes, especially medicine, food and nutrition, as well as other wellbeing-related purposes. This provides a good starting point to raise awareness on sustainable utilization patterns and the potential benefits of establishing value chains with external actors. In particular, it offers an opportunity to explore the development of small and medium scale enterprises that can be developed at the community level through appropriate R&D.

Being one of the pioneering countries in ABS, many examples have been created in India on how IPLCs can participate in ABS and the conservation, protection and valorisation of biodiversity and TK. There are several innovative initiatives proactively led by communities to protect TK, such as community knowledge registers / People's Biodiversity Registers and the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL). Besides, there are a number of other sui generis mechanisms of protection, value addition and sharing of benefits. Additionally, India's three-tiered institutional approach to implementing ABS granted significant authority over local resources and knowledge to local biodiversity committees over the last decade. This provides an excellent opportunity to learn about possibilities and challenges in moving forward the ABS agenda especially with relevance to IPLCs.

In Africa, too, more and more communities are actively engaging in the protection, conservation and valorisation of their TK and the associated genetic resources, e.g. by elaborating biocultural

community protocols (BCPs) or by setting up value chains with external actors on the basis of the ABS principles. In line with this, IPLCs are also increasingly engaging in national processes of ABS strategy development and the elaboration of the related regulatory frameworks and administrative systems.

Approach

Increasingly states are recognizing the NP as an international instrument to create an enabling environment for ABS. Hence, the number of ratifications of the NP is rising; currently 57 states are Parties to the NP, with 42 of those being members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states. In addition, the demand for direct technical support to establish a regulatory framework for processing access applications to GR and associated TK and issuing permits while protecting the rights of the knowledge holders is growing. Hence the Access and Benefit Sharing Capacity Development Initiative (ABS Initiative), established in 2006, is assisting governments, private sector and communities to implement the NP and reap its benefits – including benefits to local communities who are the custodians of GR and associated TK.

To further assist countries to leverage on the abovementioned opportunities, creative and inclusive approaches are required to build awareness and capacities of the communities to enable them to operate successfully with external and foreign users from public research institutions and the private sector. Previous work has demonstrated that peer-to-peer learning exchanges among experts and practitioners in communities can catalyse more effective dissemination of ideas. It can further enable improved strategizing at the local level, since community members are often better able to convey and understand challenges in a practical manner. Amongst the agencies that have applied a peer-to-peer exchange approach at the local level, actively engaging communities to synergize efforts, are the UNDP Equator Initiative, the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), COMPAS as well as the United Nations University-Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS). All these organisations are partners of the Biodiversity and Community Health (BaCH) Initiative, which is actively working towards linking biodiversity conservation, revitalising traditional knowledge and medicinal practices with creating sustainable livelihood opportunities to ultimately improve the wellbeing of local communities.

Objectives

Taking into account the diversity of local innovations in the field of ABS and the conservation, protection and valorisation of biodiversity and traditional knowledge in India and the increasing engagement of communities in Africa in relevant issues, learning exchanges among experts and practitioners in communities bear great potential for IPLCs from the two regions.

Against this background, the ABS Initiative and the BaCH Initiative are jointly facilitating a Community-to-Community Exchange and Capacity Development Workshop for Traditional Knowledge Holders in Bangalore, India in September/October 2015 to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase the understanding of the relevance of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) principles on ABS and the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol at the local level;
- Discuss ABS-relevant challenges faced by communities and enable the sharing of experiences and ideas on the sustainable utilisation of GR and its potential for local economic development;
- Introduce and discuss leading examples of ABS and models for the conservation, protection and valorisation of TK by visiting major hubs and centres of TK, biodiversity and ABS activities in three states of South India;
- Provide an opportunity for developing partnerships among different participants from selected African countries and India.

The workshop will include a field trip of 3-5 days which will allow participants to visit and explore local initiatives working on traditional knowledge, biodiversity and ABS in three states of South India.

During three workshop days, background information will be provided by various international and national experts, and participants will have the opportunity to discuss the examples visited during the field trip and share their own experiences in the field.

Participants

Participants will be about 45 representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society organisations and holders of traditional knowledge from India and several African countries. Representatives of relevant government bodies, public research institutions and the private sector in India will also be invited as resource people. Interpretation English-French-English will be provided during the workshop.